

on the precipice of financial and spiritual ruin. So why on Earth would our message amidst this growing populous tempest be to tell voters that rules are required to protect them from their bad judgment, to take from them purposely the ability to change policies whenever and however they wish?

Now, Senate Republicans will say that even though the filibuster is anti-majoritarian—right, it is. It says that even if the public installs a majority in the Senate that wants policy A, the rules are going to be constructed in the Senate to prevent it from happening. Senate Republicans will say that even though it is anti-majoritarian, it is for good reason because, as I have heard many of my colleagues say, it promotes compromise.

Well, I have been in the Senate now for 8, 9 years. Once in a blue Moon, like this summer on the infrastructure bill, there is a big bipartisan achievement. But anyone who believes that the rules of the Senate right now incentivizes bipartisanship should just watch the Senate for, like, a few days.

Today, the 60-vote threshold just allows the minority to sit back and say, no, no, no, over and over again, in large part, because its usage has changed so much. It didn't used to be that the filibuster, the 60-vote threshold, was applied to everything.

Up until the 1970s, cloture votes were almost nonexistent in the Senate. Big things routinely passed with 50 votes. Think about this. In 1994, Senator FEINSTEIN forced a vote here on one of the most controversial topics that we could talk about—a ban on assault weapons. It received, in 1994, fewer votes than did the Manchin-Toomey background checks bill 30 years later. But the assault weapons ban, arguably way more controversial than the background checks bill, passed and became law while the background checks bill didn't. Why? Because in 1994, many important votes, even the assault weapons ban, were allowed to proceed on a majority-vote basis.

That all changed, mostly when Democrats won the Senate in 2007, and Barack Obama was elected President. But no matter who started this policy of applying the 60-vote threshold to everything, today both parties use it. Democrats used it when we were in the minority.

The practice of the filibuster doesn't jibe with this clarion call of adhering to Senate tradition because Senate tradition is not to use the 60-vote threshold on everything. Let's be honest. We are not going back to a world in which Senators self-regulate the filibuster. And there is no sign that the claim the filibuster is an incentive for bipartisanship is going to suddenly become true.

Today, millions of voters are wondering why they vote to change the people who get elected but then nothing actually changes.

We should have a better answer than just Senate tradition.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. President, President Biden's decision to remove our remaining troops from Afghanistan was the right one, no question about it.

President Trump set the Biden administration up for failure. Trump's agreement with the Taliban committed us to withdrawing all of our troops, and had Biden torn up that agreement, he would have had to send tens of thousands of troops into Afghanistan to push back the Trump-era Taliban gains. The American public would not have supported another Afghanistan troop surge and for good reason. The overnight collapse of the Afghan Army and Government was, frankly, proof that 20 years of nation building had failed, and another 20 years wasn't going to result in a different outcome.

President Biden made the right decision to leave. The American people, by a large margin, support that decision.

But right now we need to be honest. The question of what to do now, as Afghanistan crumbles into a nightmarish failed state, is a moral knot almost impossible to untangle.

As chair of the Foreign Relations subcommittee that oversees Afghanistan policy, I thought a lot about this question, and I have come to a few conclusions that I want to share quickly with my colleagues.

First, let's just take a minute to talk about what it is like to be living in Afghanistan right now. It is a nightmare. Once the U.S. military occupation and all the foreign aid that came with it disappeared, the Afghanistan economy collapsed, predictably.

Today, winter is setting in, and more than half of the population—23 million people—don't have enough food to eat. By this summer, 97 percent of Afghans will be living below the poverty line, trying to survive on less than \$2 a day. With 9 million people just one step away from famine, this humanitarian crisis could kill more Afghans than the past 20 years of war.

And herein lies the quandary. On one side is what sounds like a pretty clear and convincing argument. Essentially, the Taliban has to own this. We warned the Taliban that this collapse would occur if they took the nation by force. That is why we sat at a table with them and tried to explain that it was in their best interests and the best interests of the nation for the Taliban to share power with the elected Afghan Government.

But the Taliban did not listen. They took Kabul and should own the results. To send billions to solve the humanitarian crisis they caused would be to bail the Taliban out and incentivize other insurgent groups to make similar, rash decisions.

But on the other hand is an equally clear and convincing argument.

We stood by the Afghan people for two decades—protecting them, working with them. We spent hundreds of billions of dollars helping to raise up the future of millions Afghan families,

women, and girls. And now those same Afghans, those same families, the ones who, frankly, have nothing to do with the Taliban are dying, potentially, by the tens of thousands. And we have the power to do something about it. How could we let the Afghan people die needlessly if we have the power to stop it?

Now, we possess this power because it is U.S. policy toward the Taliban government that is contributory toward this crisis. It is not the proximate cause, but it is contributory. When Kabul fell suddenly last August, the administration sensibly froze \$7 billion of the former Afghan Government's assets that are held at the Federal Reserve that we didn't want the Taliban to control. But that money isn't ours; it rightfully belongs to the Afghan people. Further, our sanctions on the Taliban—completely justified because of the Taliban's embrace of terrorism—essentially handcuffs the Afghan economy and therefore contributes to the country's economic descent. So we need to understand that our policies are contributing to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

But what if these two points—that the Taliban should own this and that we can't stand by, idly, while people die—what if they aren't in 100-percent contrast? What if we could help the Afghan people without directly empowering the Taliban? Wouldn't that be the best possible answer?

The good news is, is that the middle road is possible. I am going to be honest. It is not easy, but it is possible.

Over the last 20 years, the United States has spent billions in our taxpayer dollars to build schools and health clinics and a robust civil service. The number of schools today, for instance, is five times higher in Afghanistan than it was in 2001. That is because of American investment.

We can and we should find ways to pay the salaries of those who work at these nonpolitical institutions through the U.N. and NGOs on the ground, going around the Taliban-led government to keep those essential services running and to inject some much needed money into the economy. Again, this isn't easy to do, but it is worthwhile given the stakes.

We can also support the U.N. directly. Yesterday, the U.N. asked for a \$4.5 billion call in humanitarian aid to stave off catastrophe in Afghanistan. This is the largest single-country appeal in history. That should tell you about the scale of the crisis that we are facing. It is larger than what we see in Syria or Yemen or Ethiopia.

I support the administration's decision to dedicate an additional \$308 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. That money can help save lives. But Congress should authorize more.

Make no mistake, the Taliban and, frankly, 20 years of corrupt Afghan Government do own this debacle. The choices they made have led to this day.

But our hands aren't clean. Our mismanaged occupation is part of the story.

Right now, as the Afghan economy collapses and families face starvation, burying our heads in the sand is not a solution. We can find ways to save lives without unreasonably empowering the Taliban.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The Senator from Arkansas.

FILIBUSTER

Mr. COTTON. Madam President:

Right now, we are on the precipice of a constitutional crisis. We are about to step into the abyss. I want to talk for a few minutes why we are on that precipice and why we are looking into the abyss.

Let me first ask a fundamental question: What is the crisis that calls for the undoing of two centuries of tradition? . . . Are . . . Senators merely doing their jobs as legislators, responding to a generalized public calling for the abolition of the filibuster? Clearly not. It is not the American people at large who are demanding detonation of the nuclear option.

[T]he nuclear option is being pushed largely by the radioactive rhetoric of a small band of radicals who hold in their hands the political fortunes of the President.

Constitutional scholars will tell us that the reason we have these rules in the Senate—unlimited debate, two-thirds to change the rules, the idea that 60 have to close off debate—is embodied in the spirit and rule of the Constitution. . . . That is what the Constitution is all about, and we all know it.

It is the Senate where the Founding Fathers established a repository of checks and balances. It is not like the House of Representatives where the majority leader or the Speaker can snap his fingers and get what he wants. . . . On important issues, the Founding Fathers wanted—and they were correct in my judgment—that the slimmest majority should not always govern. . . . The Senate is not a majoritarian body.

The bottom line is very simple: The ideologues in the Senate want to turn what the Founding Fathers called the cooling saucer of democracy into the rubber stamp of dictatorship. . . . They want to make this country into a banana republic where if you don't get your way, you change the rules! Are we going to let them? It'll be a doomsday for democracy if we do.

I, for one, hope and pray that it will not come to this. But I assure my colleagues, at least speaking for this Senator . . . I will do everything I can to prevent the nuclear option from being invoked not for the sake of myself or my party but for the sake of this great Republic and its traditions.

Those are powerful words, but they are not mine. Every word of my speech today was originally spoken by our esteemed colleague, the senior Senator from New York, CHUCK SCHUMER. Senator SCHUMER spoke so eloquently in defense of the Senate's rules, customs, and traditions when the fortunes of his party looked a little different. My, how times have changed. Now it is Senator SCHUMER's fingers that are hovering over the nuclear button, ready to destroy the Senate for partisan advantage.

Think about it. The narrowest majority in Senate history wants to break

the Senate rules to control how voters in every State elect Senators. Could there be a better argument to preserving the Senate's rules, customs, and traditions?

So, before it is too late, let us reflect on the wise and eloquent words of Senator SCHUMER's, words that are as true today as they were when he spoke them, even if Senator SCHUMER is singing a different tune today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, the Senate is designed to be a place where the Members of the minority party and the millions of Americans they represent are heard. In this Senate, the minority could not be any bigger. In fact, if the minority were any bigger, we would be in the majority. This is a 50–50 Senate, and it is no time to take away the protections that the Senate for almost 200 years has afforded to the minority. The considerations given to the minority are important not only to the Senators and the millions of people they represent, but I think they are important in how the country moves forward.

I served in the House. I like the House. I watch the House as closely as any Senator does. Every time the House changes, the House passes a bunch of pretty dramatic legislation. Then it comes to the Senate. That dramatic legislation they passed in the House doesn't go anywhere in the Senate. When the House changes again—and it has a number of times in the last 20 years—the other side comes in and passes legislation that reverses all of that and maybe does a little dramatic legislation of their own that also doesn't go anywhere when it gets to the Senate.

If all laws were passed by a simple majority, there would be the potential for the majority to rewrite the country's laws constantly, no matter how small the shift in power was. It is always a mistake, frankly, to act like you have a mandate if you don't have one. It is a mistake for the country to change direction dramatically before the country has had time to think about it. The bureaucratic whiplash could be enormous. The economic impact could be enormous of the changing policies on regulation and taxes and everything else in a dramatic way every time one side gets some small advantage over the other side.

For the past year, we have heard a constant refrain from our colleagues on the other side of the aisle that the legislative filibuster—the supermajority to move to finalize a piece of legislation—must be reformed. At the present moment, we are hearing it must be reformed only, maybe, for elections, that we should have a carve-out for elections. Just a few weeks ago, it had to be reformed to have a carve-out for the debt ceiling. I am sure, if we had done either of those things, in a few weeks, we would be talking about a third

carve-out. And what are we doing it for? We are doing it for what I see as a federalization of the election process.

When asked in a Morning Consult/POLITICO poll that was just released today—so this is something the American people have just weighed in on today. When they were asked which of the three voting ideas that were polled should be a top priority of the Congress in the voting area—one was reforming Congress's role in counting electoral votes; one was expanding voting access; one was expanding the oversight of the State changes in elections—they were all beaten by “none of the above.” “None of the above” got more votes in that poll than some of the top priorities the Democrats were talking about.

We hear that we have to extend the Voting Rights Act. We have even titled the Voting Rights Act after a person whom I served with in the House, whom I traveled with, whom I had a close friendship with—John Lewis. That would be a good reason for me to vote for the Voting Rights Act, and certainly I voted to extend the Voting Rights Act before. In fact, I would vote to extend the Voting Rights Act today, and I would even be more happy to vote for the Voting Rights Act today if it were the Voting Rights Act that just happened to be named for John Lewis. The Voting Rights Act in 1965 was 12 pages. The extensions have all been about the same size. This bill has another 110 pages of additional legislative things that don't deal with the principles of the Voting Rights Act at all; they deal with the Federal Government's taking over the election process.

We have seen our colleagues talk about this in one bill after another. I think the motives are pretty transparent right now; it is another way to break the filibuster. But we hear that the laws that States are passing—and by the way, the States have been passing election laws for the whole country, as it relates to their States, for a little over 200 years now. The Constitution was pretty specific as to who would conduct elections in the country and who would set the rules and regulations in the country for those elections.

We hear that these laws are very restrictive. Now, mostly, these laws are laws that the legislatures leaned forward, as they should have, in my opinion, in a pandemic environment. It was an election that, in at least 100 years, we had never conducted anything like with the pandemic experience we were in. So they leaned forward. They allowed things that had never been allowed before: more mail-in voting, voting from your car, voting from a parking lot, all sorts of things. Then those same legislatures looked back at what had happened as a result of that and said: Do we want to keep all of this as if we were going to have a pandemic every year or do we want to keep part of it? In every case that I have looked